

Mid-Career Academic Studies Help Build a Platform for Consulting Excellence

Many people want to become business and organizational consultants. Why? People who work in such consulting have a chance to work on important questions, earn good pay, and make a positive impact on our society. The preferred pathway into consulting for most people is to go to a highly esteemed university, do well in business and organizationally related courses, and be hired into a brand name consulting firm. Unfortunately, fewer than one in a hundred who want to pursue this path get the chance to do so. Does that mean that there are no other opportunities? Of course not.

Consider the case of Dr. Annette Cordell, a native Australian from Sydney. As a teenager, she loved music and was trained as a pianist and harpist at the elite Sydney Conservatorium. With her many musical talents, she was soon off on a very successful career as a professional singer and harpist. Knowing that few enjoy lifelong careers as entertainers, Ms. Cordell decided to study accounting as a back-up for her musical career. Leaving entertainment after eight years, she next worked as a contract accountant. In that new work she felt overburdened due to a very busy workload, and as a result she avoided for many years the time-consuming and burdensome task of adding to her educational qualifications.

By 2000, she was working as a professional consultant and decided the time had come to further develop her new career by taking an MBA degree online at a leading Australian university. The experience left her feeling frustrated. The classes didn't provide new knowledge that built on what she had already learned as a consultant. She stopped her studies and looked for a new program that might better fit her needs.

This time she chose to complete her MBA and pursue a Ph.D. degree at Rushmore University. Rushmore appealed to her because:

1. There was a diverse curriculum from which to choose courses.
2. She could select just courses that were relevant to her interests and needs.
3. Courses there would allow her to familiarize herself with theory while gaining expertise from applying that theory in practice.
4. Her work would be done under the individual supervision of top-line, highly experienced professionals who are very accessible.

At a crossroads in her career, she initially chose a general approach that she hoped would make her more marketable as a professional contractor. Fate intervened at that point when she won a contract for a major consultancy with a new Australian Commonwealth public sector agency operating under the Financial Management and Accountability Act. She then used this work to refocus her Ph.D. studies into corporate accountability and governance within organizations.

She turned her attention to courses that would assist her in performing her new consulting assignment. In these studies, she learned a great deal about what factors to consider and how to develop appropriate guidelines and rules for operating an organization. This was a work of love because she felt an affinity for creating such transparency and accountability at a time when the demand for this expertise was rapidly growing.

From her experience with one agency, Ms. Cordell created a template that could be used by all government agencies in Australia operating under the Financial Management and Accountability Act. This template was a state-of-the-art tool that incorporated best practices in clear English. In turn, the template attracted great interest among the agencies and professional service firms wishing to work in this area, establishing a wonderful platform for new professional growth in her chosen field.

After graduating, Dr. Cordell realized that she now had the tools to take on similar challenges in new areas of organizational development and build more professional platforms for her future success. Since graduating, Dr Cordell has been awarded major consulting contracts affecting Whole of Government Operations, with contracts requiring the creation of operating frameworks and legislative redevelopment for Whole of Government Financial Operations. Most recently Dr. Cordell successfully developed a governance and financial operating framework for a new regulatory authority to be directly controlled by both the Australian and New Zealand governments—the first of its type in the world.

Here's what Dr. Cordell had to say about her Rushmore experience:

“Until I commenced my studies at Rushmore I could be likened to a ship without a rudder. Proficient in many aspects of business in both the private and public sectors, I did not have a full appreciation of holistic

operational values. Undertaking the courses in corporate governance from its creation to implementation has established a deep personal appreciation of holistic organizational management and the requirement for a formal structure to underpin an organization's success.”

She also noted key personal accomplishments that her Rushmore studies brought:

- “a sense of personal achievement—to have succeeded in a lifetime goal, and to have produced a quality job along the way;
- a sense of pride in being allowed to prove that I can do something complex and relevant to my career;
- a deeper appreciation of the skills that I have acquired over the years, and their importance in providing consultancy services to my employers; and
- a sense of personal worth in that I can contribute new and original thought to produce a cutting edge business tool for use by others (FMA template).”

While no one can know what the long-term consequences of this educational experience will be, there can be no doubt that Dr. Cordell has taken a major step up onto a new platform of professional success.

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Donald W. Mitchell is a professor at Rushmore University. For more information about ways to engage in fruitful lifelong learning at Rushmore to increase your effectiveness, visit

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